during the Ninth Five Year Plan, a centrally sponsored scheme of Non-Timber Forest Produce including Medicinal Plants was under implementation in the State with the basic objective of conserving and increasing production of non-timber forest produce including medicinal plants.

Four (4) projects with an outlay of Rs. 764.99 lakhs for treating an area of 4795 ha. were sanctioned against which an amount of Rs. 564.58 lakhs was released. The physical achievement upto December 2001 in 4225 ha.

Protection of Wild Life

3978. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have dissolved a high powered Committee which had been set up last year to suggest ways to preserve and promote wildlife health in the country;

(b) if so, the facts and details thereof;

(c) whether the necessary steps to protect the life of wild animals, tigers in particular, from being poached or illegally hunted, have been found to be inadequate; and

(d) if so, the facts thereof and the steps formulated to implement various recommendations on protection of wild animals?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) Large number of vacancies at the field level, inadequate mobility and fire arms, lack of expertise in the field of intelligence gathering, investigation and prosecution have been found to be the main bottle-necks in the effetive protection of wildlife particularly, tiger, leopard, elephant and rhino which are in high demand in the clandestine markets across the border. Prime Minister has appealed to all the Chief Ministers to address the aforesaid problems on priority basis. In the recent meeting of the Indian Board for Wild-Life held on 21.1.2002 under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, the Wild Life Conservation Strategy 2002 was adopted. The salient features of the strategy are annexed as statement. (*See below*). All State Government have been requested to implement the strategy effectively.

Statement

Salient features of the Wildlife Conservation Strategy-2002 adopted by the Indian Board for Wild-life.

1. Wild-Life and forests shall be declared priority sector at the national level for which funds should be earmarked.
2. Law enforcement agencies must ensure that those engaged in poaching, illicit trade in wild-life and wild-life products, destruction of their habitat, and such other illegal activities are given quick and deterrent punishment.
3. The potential in wildlife tourism should be fully tapped, taking care that it does not have adverse impact on wild-life and protected areas. The revenue earned from increased tourism should be used entirely to augment available resources for conservation.
4. No diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes from critical and ecologically fragile wild-life habitat shall be allowed
5. Lands falling within 10 km of the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries should be notified as Eco-fragile zones under section 3(v) of the Environment (Protection) Act and Rule 5 Sub-rule 5(viii) & (x) of the Environment (Protection) Rules.
6. Removal of encroachments and illegal activities from within forestlands and Protected Areas.
7. Settlement of rights in National Parks and Sanctuaries should not be used to exclude or reduce the areas that are crucial and integral part of the wild-life habitat.
8. More than 2000 vacant posts in the frontline staff of Protected Areas shall be filled immediately and provided basic infrastructure for efficient discharge of duties. Ban on recruitment of staff against vacant post should be lifted on lines with the Police Department.

Trade of animal skins

3979. SHRI AIMADUDDIN AHMED KHAN (DURRU): DR. KARAN SINGH:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the report appearing in the Times of India dated the 19th March, 2002, captioned "E-auction of tiger skin raises a stink";

(b) if so, whether Government have inquired into the illegal trade in tiger and other animal skins; and